

# Queer Art:

A Brief Examination of LGBTQ+  
Artists in History

By Raymond Pagni

Alternative Title: Fags of Art History



Silence=Death, 1989

Haring created 50 public pieces from 1982-1989 at locations such as charities, hospitals, daycare centers, and orphanages. His 1986 “Crack is Wack” mural was a famous landmark along New York’s FDR drive. In April 1986, he opened the Pop Shop, a retail store in Soho selling t-shirts, toys, posters, buttons, and magnets with his images. This allowed people greater access to his work and products at a low cost.

Sexuality was a prominent theme in his work throughout his entire career, and he was one of the first to use homosexuality in a politically progressive way. However in the final years of his life his portrayals of sex and sexuality were affected by constant fear as the AIDS threat became more of a reality. In works filled with monsters, skeletons and beasts, sexuality is presented as threatening. This drama in his work could also represent the stigma of homosexual relationships during his time.

Haring was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988. Images during last years of his life spoke about his illness and generated activism and awareness about AIDS. At the time of his diagnosis, AIDS was often referred to as a “gay cancer” and perceived by many as a divine retribution for deviant behaviors.

His 1988 piece *Cat no. 27* features a large horned sperm, representing AIDS, drawn in white over a black background. The sperm hatching from an egg strapped to a person’s back represents the oppressive effects of AIDS on both an individual and community level.

Haring’s 1989 piece *Silence = Death* which shows multiple figures covering their eyes, mouth, and ears illustrates the oppression and invisibility that AIDS

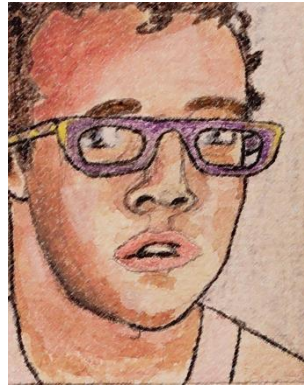
victims felt in the 80s. The figures are laid over a pink triangle, a symbol associated with gay men. The pink triangle and the title “Silence = Death” are also associated with a prominent AIDS advocacy coalition, ACT UP.



Cat no. 27, 1988

Keith Haring (born May 4 1958 in Reading, PA and died Feb 16, 1990 in New York, NY)

Keith Haring is best known for his neo-expressionist style, pop art, and street art. Throughout his career, he worked with artists and performers like Madonna, Yoko Ono, and Andy Warhol. His work often expressed universal concepts of birth, death, love, sex, and war, while calling attention to social and political issues such as the Berlin Wall (“destroy the wall



through painting it”), Apartheid, substance abuse, the AIDS epidemic, and LGBTQ rights. With accessible works primarily featuring bold lines and direct messages he was able to attract a wide audience.

Keith Haring began his career by drawing with chalk in NYC subway stations from 1980 to 1985. He often filled empty poster spaces with his chalk drawings, sometimes making up to 40 pieces in a day, and was arrested multiple times for vandalism.

This zine holds a very special place in my heart, and I am so glad to be able to dedicate it to Queerport. Thank you to Queerport for being such a rock for queer folx in Shreveport. And a special thank you to Derick Stevens-Jones for making it happen and bringing us all together.



Ignorance=Fear, 1989

Donatello (1386- Dec. 3, 1466; born & died in the Republic of Florence)

Renaissance era artist Donatello is considered the founder of modern sculpture and one of the greatest sculptors of all time. His statues were exceptionally lifelike, and his work serves as a bridge from classic to modern art.

Donatello primarily lived in Florence, Italy, where homosexuality was common among artists and patrons. The



French called gay sex the “Florentine Vice.” Despite the sizable community of gay men, homosexuality was frowned upon by certain entities such as the Church and same-sex relations were illegal; a large portion of gay men in the city were accused of or charged with the crime of sodomy.

One of the most important works in history of western art is Donatello’s bronze *David*, created between 1430-1440, which was commissioned by Cosimo de Medici for the Palazzo Medici. . The sculpture is believed to be the first piece of the Renaissance sculpture and first freestanding nude sculpture since ancient times. Historic representations of the biblical David generally featured rock hard abs and hyper-masculine lines, whereas Donatello’s displayed a sensual pose and androgynous body. This fluid view of masculinity was very alternative to the time, and is a large sign of Donatello’s sexuality.

Donatello focused on the concept of realism- accepting things as they are and sculpting or drawing things as lifelike as possible. His great talent was displaying emotion. Despite his great talents, patrons found him hard to deal and work with. Additionally, Donatello was notorious for falling for his male models and apprentices (who he often chose for their beauty rather than skill) according to a 1584 book about the Florentine Circle of Cosimo de Medici. He never married.

Revolutionary in its day, it took a while for the statue to be accepted and

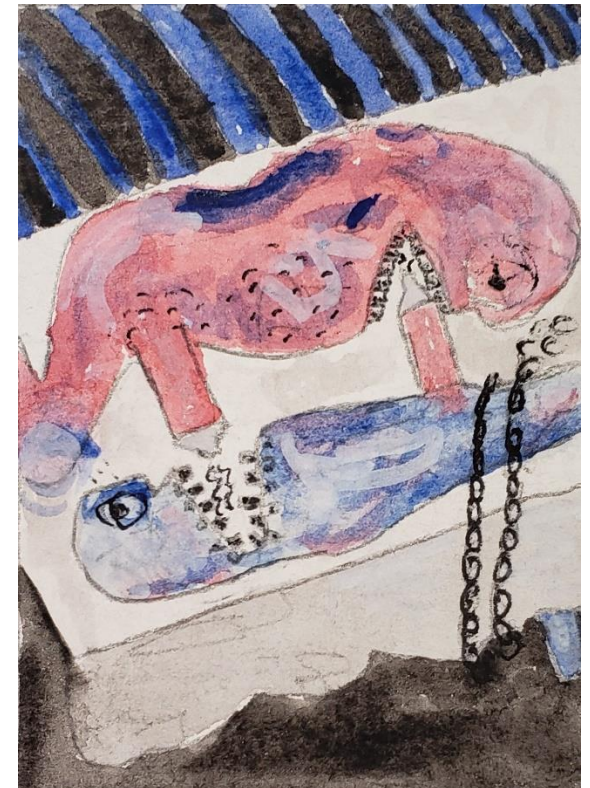


Man in Shower in Beverly Hills,  
1964

Schlesinger in 1966. Schlesinger posed for many of his paintings and drawings, including his 1971 *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)*.

Hockney sought to incorporate allusions of his homosexuality into his paintings. Homosexuality was illegal in England at the time, so he painted a part of himself into his art as a sort of self-portrait. He celebrated gay love

by incorporating phallic elements in tandem with fantastic colors and imagery. He celebrated the differences between his unapologetically extravagant gay lifestyle and the heteronormative standards of the time.



Cleaning Teeth, Early Evening (10pm) WII, 1962

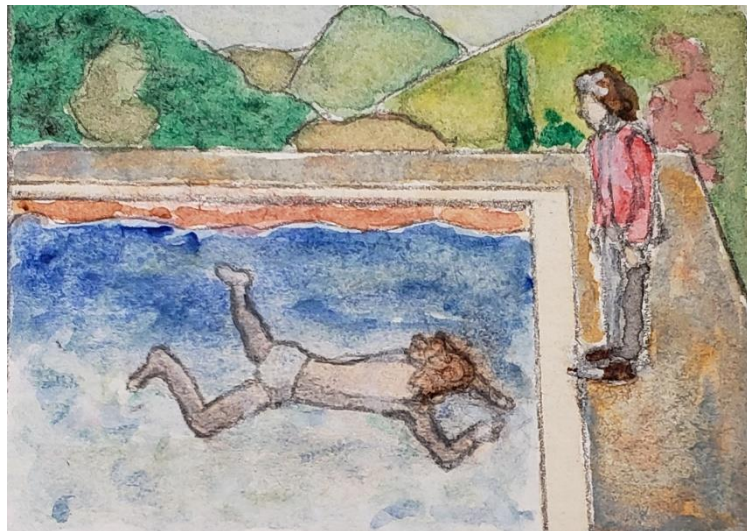


David Hockney (Born July 9, 1937 in Bradford, UK)

David Hockney was a painter, draftsman, printmaker, stage designer, and photographer. He was an important part of the British Pop Art movement of the 1960's, though his early work had more expressionist elements similar to Francis Bacon. Hockney lived between Los Angeles, London, and Paris.

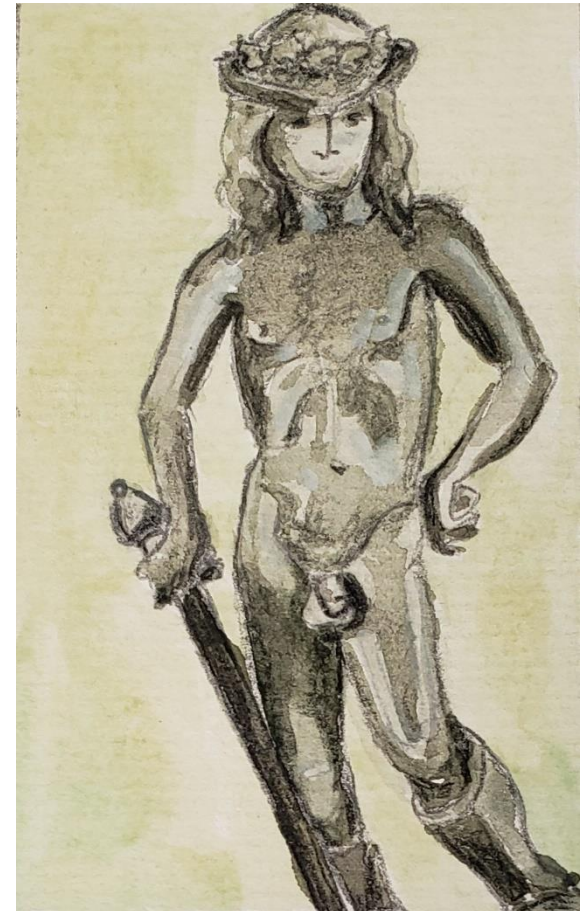
He attended Royal College of Art in London. A requirement for graduation was that he had to complete an assignment of a life drawing of a nude female model. As protest, he painted his *Life Painting for a Diploma* in 1962.

While Hockney lived in Los Angeles, he started a series that is focused on swimming pools. He painted men sleeping near, entering, leaving swimming pools. He used the comparatively new medium acrylic for its vibrant colors. He taught at UCLA and became romantically involved with student Peter



Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures), 1971

later be copied. Ultimately it was removed from its pedestal in the Palazzo Medici and replaced by Michelangelo's *David* for being 'imperfect.' Donatello's *David* is now located at the Bargello National Museum in Florence, Italy.



David, 1430-1440

Leonardo Da Vinci (born April 15, 1452 in Anchiano, Italy and died May 2, 1519 in Château du Clos Lucé, Amboise, France)

Leonardo Da Vinci was an Italian painter, draftsman, architect, and engineer who epitomized the Renaissance humanist ideal. He used his intellect, unusual powers of observation and mastery of the art of drawing to study nature itself. He flourished in the fields of both art and science.



He began an apprenticeship at the age of 15, where he trained in painting, sculpture, and technical/mechanical arts. Da Vinci was accepted to the painter's guild of Florence in 1472, though he remained in his teacher's workshop until 1477. He remained in Florence and worked independently until moving to Milan in 1482 to work in the service of the city's Duke as both a painter and engineer. During his 17 years in Milan, Da Vinci painted one of his most well known works, *The Last Supper* (1495-1498).

After returning to Florence in the early 1500s, he worked on *Mona Lisa* (1503-1519) while also engaging in a period of intensive scientific study. He studied human anatomy through taboo dissections of corpses at the hospital of Santa Marie Nuova, developing an extensive understanding of the structure and functions of the human body. He would create detailed depictions of bodies and organs as part of his studies.

He was charged twice and once jailed for the charge of sodomy with a male sex worker Jacopo Salterelli, however there were no corroborating witnesses and the charges were dismissed. He wrote in his notebooks how the thought of sex between a man and a woman disgusted him. He drew far more nude men than women, and paid more detail to the male genitalia. He sometimes drew penises in his notebooks.

a drawing from Willem de Kooning and spent much time slowly and carefully erasing it. He wanted to see if art could focus on the removal of marks rather than the accumulation.

His first combine, *Bed* (1955), was a Neo-Dada assemblage of traditional materials and objects from everyday life, his bedding. It was an intimate self portrait consistent with his assertion that painting relates both to art and life. For this piece, Rauschenberg ran out of canvas and resorted to his bed linens and quilt. He scribbled on the pillows and sheets with pencil, then dripped and spilled paint on them.

Rauschenberg found beauty in everyday objects and transformed their normativity into something unexpected. He allowed fluidity in his aesthetics and went beyond the cultural norm of the art period of his time.

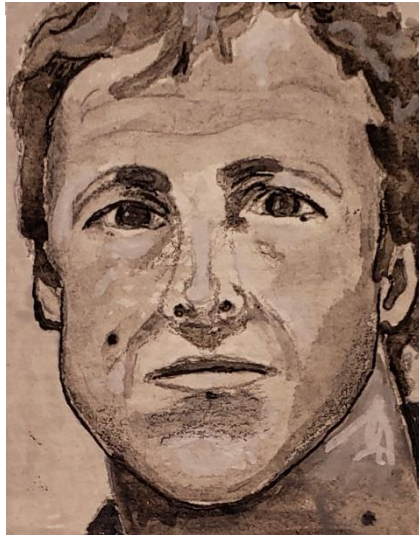


Bed, 1955



Robert Rauschenberg (Born October 22, 1925 in Port Arthur, TX and died May 12, 2008 in Captiva, FL)

Robert Rauschenberg emerged during the Abstract Expressionism movement. He was part of that movement but also moved over into Neo-Dadaism. He is known for his combines, incorporating everyday objects as art materials and blurred distinctions between



painting and sculpture. He used many mediums including painting, sculpture, print, photography, and performance.

Rauschenberg was drafted into the Navy during WWII and later used his G.I. bill to study at the Académie Julian in Paris. There he met Susan Weil, who he was married to from 1950 to 1953. Together they went to Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In 1952, while at BMC, Rauschenberg began a romantic relationship with fellow student Cy Twombly. Weil divorced him and took their son after he moved back to New York in 1953.

He and Twombly traveled Europe and North Africa, and he began making his first assemblages. He started using the term combines in 1954 because he had combined paint and objects on the canvas.

He met Jasper Johns in winter of 1953 and, after several months of friendships, began a romantic and artistic partnership. They remained romantically involved until 1961 when Johns gained a lot of fame. They remained artistic partners for life.

Rauschenberg took a very Dadaist attitude questioning the definition of art and the role of the artist. This led him to a more chance-based method for determining placement and combination of found images and objects in his art.

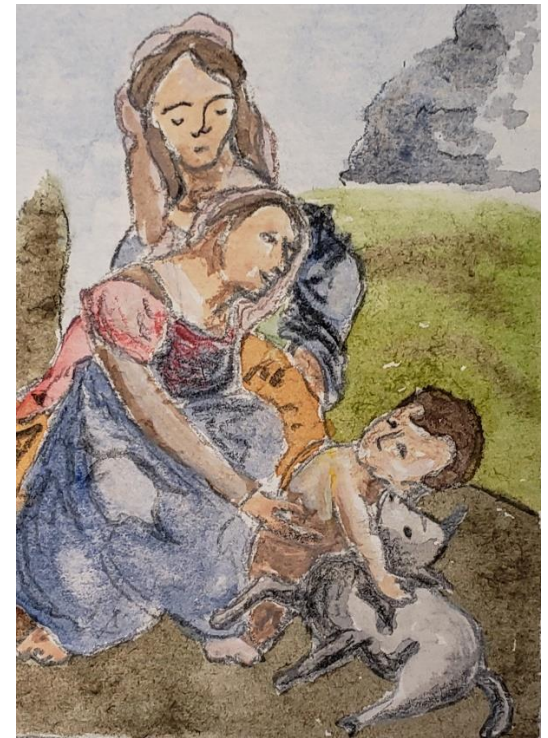
In his 1953 piece *Erased de Kooning*, Rauschenberg acquired

Around 1510, he took on Francesco Melzi as an apprentice. Melzi would become his most faithful friend and companion until his death. In 1513 he took both Melzi and his other apprentice Salai with him upon moving to Rome during a time of political turmoil. Salai is believed to have been the model for many of his homoerotic works such as *St. Jean the Baptiste* and the *Incarnate Angel*.

In 1516 he left Italy to go to Cloux, France near the king's summer palace and he was the First Painter, Architect, and Engineer to the King. He died there and was buried in the palace church of St. Florentin. His apprentices Melzi and Salai were the heirs to his scientific and artistic estate.

He had a total of 17 paintings that survive with 7 of them being unfinished. He used a technique called sfumato relief which used paper thin layers to make a smooth transition from light to shadow. He did not do frescoes as they required quick and uninterrupted

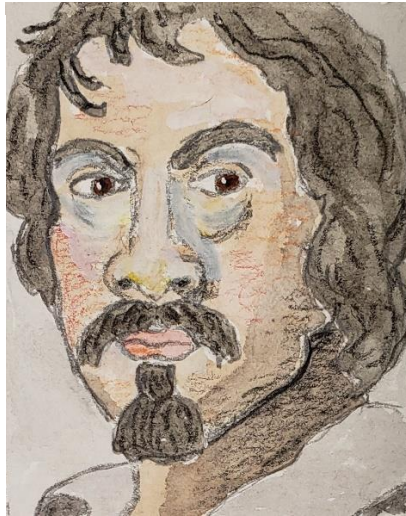
painting; instead he did tempera on dry stone walls. His notebooks add up to thousands of pages with writings and illustrations. There are 32 preserved notebooks. He used mirror writing in his notebooks.



The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, 1503-1519

Caravaggio (born September 29, 1571 in Milan, Italy and died July 18, 1610 in Porto Ercole, Tuscany, Italy)

Caravaggio was part of the baroque period, which translates to “oddly shaped pearl.” His paintings featured intense and unsettling realism, in large-scale religious works. Caravaggio was a great artistic visionary of the time but was not believed to be reliable, and his constant changes in style



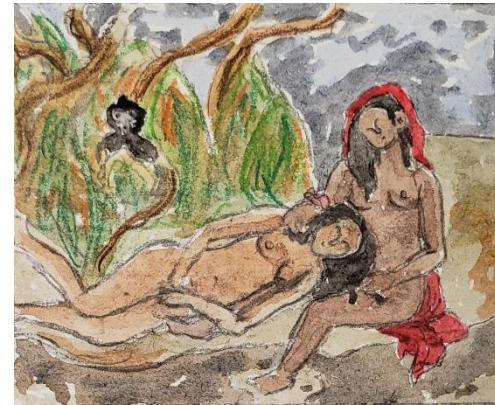
created opposition toward many of his works.

He apprenticed for 4 years to Lombard painter Simone Peterzano, beginning in 1584 following his mother's death. He became familiar with High renaissance masters. In 1592 he fled Milan and moved to Rome, with no money. A few months later he began working for Giuseppe Cesari and was painting fruits and flowers. 1594 he met Mario Minniti and took him in to live with him.

To some, the dramatic intensity in the work he created seemed vulgar and was well beyond what was acceptable during his time. Many paintings dealt with death as well as sexual depictions which the Church could not stand for. Many rejected his work, theme, and styles but it was visionary for the time and no other artists were willing to complete similar depictions.

He lived an extremely notorious life, constantly brawling or getting into arguments. He had extensive trial and police records due to disorderly conduct and how he and his friends handled themselves in public. In 1606 he killed Ranuccio Tomassoni in a duel and was outlawed from Rome. He went to Naples and was protected by the Colonna family. He was arrested in 1608 for a brawl and was exiled to Sicily.

In his art, he used the chiaroscuro technique that uses dramatic lights and darks to model figures coming out of the shadows in a “theatrical spotlight” manner. This made his paintings sensual and dreamlike.



Two Nudes in a Forest, 1939

her spine, represented by an ionic column. She is held together by a leather and metal back brace like what she would have worn in real life. To add further illustration of pain, she paints herself crying and covered in nails.

Kahlo endured much more than most, but she tried to show strength through her art. She never backed down and even went to her first art exhibition in the back of an ambulance against her doctor's orders. She

continued to stay strong throughout her life and said, “At the end of the day, we can endure much more than we think we can.”



The Broken Column, 1944

The snail is representative of the agonizingly long time it took her to get pregnant and the abdomen her traitorous womb and its inhospitality to the floating child.

In 1944's *The Broken Column*, she illustrates her lifelong relationship with her body and its brokenness. Her chest is ripped open to show



Frida Kahlo (born July 6, 1907 and died July 13, 1954 She was born and died in the same house, Casa Azul, in Coyoacán, Mexico City, Mexico)

She is known for her self portraits and nature and artifacts of Mexico. She explored questions of identity, post colonialism, gender, class, and race in Mexican society.

She at 6 years old she caught polio, which crippled her right

leg and caused it to grow short than the left, giving her a lifelong limp. When she was 18 she was involved in a bus accident which broke her spine and pelvis in 3 separate spots; this led to a life of surgeries, recovery, and pain but also the inspiration for her morbid and macabre paintings. She began painting while she was bedridden and recovering from her accident. She would also doodle on her plaster torso cast.

Her work differed from her contemporaries of the time, the Mexican Muralists. The muralists movement came after the Mexican Revolution and was backed by the government to display the country's national history and identity in the form of monumental public murals. By contrast, Kahlo used personal subject matter and an intimate scale.

Kahlo met Diego Rivera, a Mexican Muralist, while she was a student in the National Preparatory School in Mexico City. He was commissioned to do a mural for the school. He was 20 years older, but they married in 1929. The two divorced in 1939. This year, Kahlo fell in love with Josephine Baker, a French Military Intelligence agent, while in Paris. The two become famous around town for being openly bisexual. Kahlo remarried Rivera in 1940.

Much of Kahlo's work illustrates her personal struggles. Her 1932 painting *Henry Ford Hospital* portrays her battle with pregnancy and her own body. Kahlo lies in a bed with a fetus, snail, and human abdomen floating above her attached by her umbilical cords.



Bacchus, 1596

Questions of Caravaggio's sexuality began to emerge with his 1593 *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*. The youth in the painting is a scantily clothed, androgynous, and provocative boy; the fruit in the painting is depicted as overripe, implying that the boy is no longer innocent. His 1595 painting *The Musicians* displays a homosocial event of music and its connection to love, signified by the cupid on the left side of

the painting. His 1601/1602 painting *Victorious Cupid* directs the viewer's eyes to genitalia and demonstrates an overt sexuality rather than a romantic notion of love. To viewers at the time this painting proved he was guilty of sodomy, and one 17<sup>th</sup> century writer claims it to be a portrait of Caravaggio's "boy, that laid with him." Caravaggio's paintings of women never contained the same tenderness and drama that he gave to his depictions of the muscular and imperfect specimens commonly known as his "soft boys."



Victorious Cupid, 1602

Hannah Höch (Born November 1, 1889 in Gotha, Germany and died May 31, 1978 in Berlin, Germany)

Hannah Höch was a German Dada artist who primarily created collage art pieces. She was married to Kurt Matthies from 1938 to 1944. She did political collages and photo montages, which was a form she helped pioneer. She appropriated



and recombined images and text from mass media to critique popular culture, the failings of the Weimar Republic, and the socially constructed roles of women. She became associated with the Berlin Dada Group after meeting Raoul Hausmann in 1917; it was a circle of mostly male artists who satirized and critiqued German culture in society following WWI.

Raoul Hausmann was her first lover. They split in 1922.

She exhibited in the First International Dada Fair in Berlin, 1920. She was immediately tried to be edged out and Hausmann threatened to withdraw from the fair if her work was not allowed to be shown.

She explored gender and identity in her work and in particular criticized the concept of the “new woman” in Weimar Germany. In some of her works she would depict brides as mannequins and children, reflecting the idea that women are not seen as complete people and had little control over their lives. She often combined male and female aspects into one being in her collages; the androgynous characters could have been related to her bisexuality and society’s perception that feminine lesbians were attracted to masculinity, not women. She depicted same-sex couples; women were an essential there from 1896 to 1973.

The Berlin Dada group fractured in the early 1920s but she continues creating socially critical works. By the end of the 1920s she moved to the Netherlands and began a relationship with a female Dutch writer



Ohne Titel, 1930

Her post war art turns toward a more decorative abstraction and strays from her radical past.

Til Brugman, which lasted from 1926 to 1929. She had a private project that she completed in 1934 that was a scrapbook of over 100 pages where she pasted 421 photos cut from magazines and newspapers. The book’s visual intensity is mostly a matter of how they collide and rhyme across double page spreads.

She was banned from showing during the Nazi regime however remained in Germany throughout WWII. She retreated to a house outside Berlin and continued to make work.



Die Braut (Pandora), 1927